

VZCZCXRO1240
OO RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHRY #0747/01 1581721
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 071721Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9234
INFO RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE//POLAD/J2//

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000747

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

TREASURY FOR OFFICE OF AFRICAN NATIONS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12598: N/A
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: GUINEA'S UNIONS COMMIT TO STRIKE, CLAIM THE
GOVERNMENT IS NOT NEGOTIATING

REF: (A) CONAKRY 721, (B) CONAKRY 671

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Guinea's labor union coalition has issued a formal call for an open-ended general strike to begin June 8. In a meeting June 6 with AF/W Director Phil Carter, representatives from the USTG and CNTG said the government has "disappeared" from negotiations. Ironically, after signing their strike statement June 6, certain senior union leaders left the country for Geneva to join colleagues attending an international labor conference.

¶2. (SBU) The union leaders appeared united in their grievances and their commitment to launching the strike. However, they differed on whether their ultimate goal is regime change. Their positions reflect the generally more radical views of USTG membership. At this point, it appears government efforts to delay a strike have failed, barring a last-minute intervention by President Conte. While the unions' plans are peaceful, the potential exists violent protest in this atmosphere of frustration and economic misery. End Summary.

CALL FOR STRIKE ISSUED JUNE 6

¶3. (U) After all-day meetings on June 6, the USTG-CNTG union coalition released its formal strike notification (avis de greve) to the government of Guinea. It calls for a general strike of indeterminate duration to begin June 8 across Guinea. The unions have asked all workers to join in sympathy, including those in the informal sector. The support of the informal sector in the five-day strike that ended March 3 ensured the success of that historic event.

¶4. (U) The strike notice lists several grievances and reflects the language of the document prepared for President Lansana Conte after negotiations with the government began last week (ref A). Along with complaints about Guinea's dire economic condition and workers' inability to afford the basic necessities, the main points are:

-- Raises given to government workers in 2006 have been offset by corresponding increases in gasoline prices.

-- The government's decision to raise gasoline prices was unilateral, which violated the March protocol that ended the five-day strike.

-- Only four of the 20 points agreed to in that March protocol have been enacted, either partially or completely.

¶5. (U) In a document prepared for President Conte (ref A), unions provided more specific demands to avoid a strike: to cut fuel taxes in order to reduce gasoline prices from 5500 Guinea Francs/liter (\$1.09/liter) to 4350 GF/liter (\$0.87/liter), to fix rice prices at 70,000 GF per 50 kilogram sack (a 36% reduction in price, requiring an unanticipated subsidy from the government). The unions also called for another 25% raise in salaries and an increase in their transportation subsidy.

¶6. (SBU) After signing the strike notice on June 6, certain union leaders, including USTG figures Ibrahima Fofana and Louis M'Bembeh Soumah, boarded a plane for Europe, ostensibly to attend a labor conference in Geneva. Many senior CNTG figures are already there. The unions believe they have enough negotiators left to meet with the government, if the government responds to their demands.

Unions Doubt Government Will to Engage or Compromise

¶7. (SBU) In a meeting held a few hours before the strike announcement, two members of the USTG-CNTG union coalition met with visiting AF/W Director Phil Carter. The meeting provided a chance to hear their perspectives on negotiations with the government, to gauge their commitment to the latest strike, and to challenge some of their economic views. Yamoussa Toure represented the CNTG, and Louis M'Bembeh

CONAKRY 00000747 002 OF 003

Soumah represented the USTG. Toure was the CNTG signatory to the strike notice released later in the day. Soumah was one of the two senior USTG figures to leave Guinea after issuing the strike call.

¶8. (SBU) The union leaders indicated that many of the points in their latest proposal to the government are a point of departure for negotiations, not necessarily fixed demands. Toure said that certain compromises on these issues could still avoid the strike, or at least prompt union leadership to consult the rank and file. The union leaders said they doubt the government will return with an offer at this late date. After presenting the new Minister of Employment and Civil Service (essentially Labor) with their proposition on June 5, the union leaders said both she and President Conte "disappeared". They have had no response to their demands.

Union Goals: Economic Change or Regime Change?

¶9. (SBU) Toure and Soumah appeared both resigned and committed to the upcoming strike. The only division between them appeared to be their ultimate goal. USTG representative Soumah made it clear that only a change in government will lead Guinea out of its economic crisis. Soumah said the government cannot take concrete actions and that the system itself is not functional. Toure was more moderate and said concessions from the government could avoid the strike. He strongly defended the union movement as apolitical, claiming that their only concern is the well-being of Guinea's workers.

¶10. (SBU) The union leaders agreed that the government does not have the political will to manage the economy. They said that the unions and the government have been in a holding pattern for fifteen years of union demands, agreements with the administration, and broken promises. They acknowledged that the government does not have the

resources to meet their demands, but charged that mismanagement, corruption, and impunity are at the root of the problem. The unions have low regard for this new government and are holding them personally responsible for delivering concrete results. They said that, this time, they would not accept empty promises.

Momentum is Building Across Guinea

¶11. (SBU) The union leaders claimed they will have no trouble sustaining an unlimited strike, saying they have nothing to lose. They said the average worker can barely afford food, let alone pay for transport, housing, telephone, water, electricity or other services. They have mobilized their members in the interior and said that in cities across Guinea, everyone is just waiting for the word for them to begin their strike. The leaders told us that students are organizing independently and have demanded an increase in their monthly stipends paid by the government. Many believe the unions are taking advantage of the beginning of exam period to launch their action. If the students are prevented from taking their exams, they are likely to be more frustrated and eager to incite violence.

¶12. (SBU) Political party leaders acknowledged in a separate meeting June 7 that they were maintaining close contact with the unions. Contrary to earlier comments to us, the party heads said they would encourage their militants to stay at home, at least for the first day or two. On June 9, they plan to meet again with the unions, review the government's response, if any, and, at that point, determine if any additional action would be appropriate.

¶13. (SBU) Post Emergency Action Committee (EAC) met afternoon of June 7 (septel) and agreed on a warden message for American citizens and an internal security notice with the same information. We expect the strike to be widely respected June 8. The last strike was relatively peaceful, but frustrations are higher now. We are monitoring the situation closely.

Comment

CONAKRY 00000747 003 OF 003

¶14. (SBU) The unions and government are once again on a collision course. Although the most charismatic union leaders are now all outside of Guinea, there seems to be sufficient momentum fueled from below to sustain the effort for a while. However, given the day-to-day nature of survival for most people, it may be hard to sustain a strike indefinitely. At the same time, the difficulties most Guineans face have increased the pressure and frustration, and violence is possible. If major street protests occur, it will be the first major test for many of Guinea's new ministers. The Ambassador and visiting AF/W Director Phillip Carter cautioned Foreign Minister Mamady Conte on June 7 against a repressive, heavy-handed governmental response to the strike.

McDONALD